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ABSTRACT

Issue papers that focus on improving and expanding quality early childhood services in Louisiana are presented in this report. Each paper includes a description of current practice, several questions and answers concerning the issue, and a list of recommendations and strategies. Following an executive summary and introduction (which includes a table listing current early childhood services in Louisiana), the papers are divided into two general categories: educational issues and organizational issues. Papers on educational issues address the following topics: assessment; readiness; developmentally appropriate curriculum; retention and extra-year programs; heterogeneous grouping; continuity and coordination between early childhood providers; and working with parents. Organizational issues covered include: approval and licensing of programs; approval and certification of early childhood providers; staff development opportunities and requirements; and before- and after-school child care. Contains a list of 119 resources and references. (MM)

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Starting Right, Starting Right Now

Report of the

Louisiana Early Childhood Study Commission

1993

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Starting Right, Starting Right Now

Louisiana Early Childhood Study Commission

Presented to Dr. Raymond Arveson
State Superintendent of Education
March 31, 1993

For copies of this document contact:
Bureau of Chapter 1
Louisiana Department of Education
654 Main Street
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70801

Pearl Andrews (Southern University)
Theresa Anzalone (LA Dept. of Social Service)
Kathy Bash (Caddo Parish Schools)
Susan Batson (LA Dept. of Education)
Brenda Bealer (Vernon Parish Schools)
Eve Bogan (LSU Human Development Center)
Diane Burts (LSU)
Rosalind Charlesworth (LSU)
Phyllis Cuevas (McNeese State University)
Pearlie Elloie (Orleans Head Start)
Sue Elliot (LA Dept. of Children's Services)
Helen Fitzgerald (Caddo Parish Schools)
Joy Gaddis (Red River Parish Schools)
James E. Green (LA Dept. of Education)
David W. Hall (LA Dept. of Education)
Craig Hart (LSU)
Barbara Herman (National Council of Jewish Women)
Cate Heroman (LA Department of Education)
Janie Humphries (LA Tech University)
Olga Jackson (St. Mark's Community Center)
Beverly Johnson (LA Dept. of Education)
Tamara Kreinin (New Orleans Council for Young Children)
Janet Langlois (LA Dept. of Education)
Dolores Lewis (East Baton Rouge Parish Schools)
Sandy Lott (LA Dept. of Education)
Mary Lou Maples (LA Assoc. on Children Under Six
Chris Matassa (Ascension Parish Schools)
Gary Patureau (LA Literacy Council)
Pat Schindler (Newcomb Children's Center Director)
Judy Seal (St. Tammany Parish Schools)
Judy Shaver (McNeese State University)
Patty Spampneto (Orleans Parish Schools)
Judy Watts (Agenda for Children)
Amy Whitley (LA Dept. of Education)
Enola Williams (Baton Rouge Head Start)
Theta Williams (East Baton Rouge Parish Schools)
Wayne Wingate (LA Prof. Assoc. for Child Care)
Beth Wise (McNeese State University)

Acknowledgements

Edited by:

Linda Kennard
Bureau of Chapter 1
Louisiana Department of Education
654 Main Street, 3rd floor
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70801

Mary Taylor, Ph.D.
RMC Research Corporation
Region 5 Rural Technical Assistance Center
Chapter 1
1512 Larimer Street, Suite 540
Denver, Colorado 80202

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

Success in high quality early childhood programs, can give young children the confidence and skills they need to succeed in later school years. The number of children whose mothers work outside the home and the educational and social sequelae of poverty and school failure have brought concerns about early childhood to the forefront. These issue papers are intended to help focus the discussion about improving and expanding quality early childhood services in Louisiana. Throughout this document, the terms "early childhood" and "young children" refer to children from birth through age eight. The Louisiana Early Childhood Study Commission recommends the following:

Issues and Recommendations

Assessment

- Discontinue immediately the use of group paper-and-pencil standardized achievement tests for the assessment and placement of young children below grade three. Provide training in the use of multiple indicators when assessing the progress and needs of young children.

Readiness

- Adopt policies that accept children for school on the basis of chronological age and legal right to enter, shifting the focus from whether or not children are ready for school to whether the schools are ready for children.

Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

- Establish early childhood units with child-centered curricula to serve young children from preschool to third grade. Develop a well-articulated early childhood curriculum that is based on developmentally appropriate practices and allows for individual differences in maturation and growth.

Retention/Extra-Year Programs

- Reduce the use of retention prior to grade three. Replace extra-year programs with alternative strategies that address children's and families' needs.

Heterogeneous Grouping

- Eliminate whole class ability grouping. Regulate class size and adult to child ratios. Mainstream children with special needs.

Continuity and Coordination Between Early Childhood Providers

- Provide incentives to improve coordination between and among educational agencies, child care programs, and social service agencies to ease the transitions between educational settings for young children and their families.

Working with Parents

- Expand upon and encourage the development of effective parent involvement programs that enable parents to develop their parenting skills, voice their concerns, and support their children's education.

Approval/Licensing of Programs

- Standardize and strengthen licensing requirements for early childhood care/education providers. Require all programs to address NAEYC standards for developmentally appropriate practices through staff training and development.

Approval/Certification of Early Childhood Providers

- Develop levels of training for early childhood professionals and non-professionals which include a beginning certification, national credentials, and/or a college degree.

Staff Development Opportunities & Requirements

- Establish interagency oversight committee charged with the task of planning, coordinating, publicizing, and improving the quality of staff development activities available to early childhood service providers. Provide training in developmentally appropriate practices and effective methods for working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Before and After School Child Care

- Work closely with schools to expand upon and/or design quality before and after school programs that reduce risk factors for all children.

Introduction

Presentation of Starting Right, Starting Right Now[1]

by Linda Kennard to Dr. Raymond Arveson, State Superintendent of Education

All children in America will start school ready to learn. So states the first of the six National Education Goals set in 1990 by the nation's governors and the president. In Louisiana, we phrase it slightly different: *All children will be ready for the first grade.* While it sounds straightforward, the readiness goal has evoked mixed feelings from experts in early childhood education, who fear it holds as much potential to harm children as to help them.

The readiness goal springs from a widespread perception that many children entering kindergarten are poorly prepared physically, mentally, and emotionally to participate in school. In a recent survey of more than 7,000 kindergarten teachers by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, teachers reported that more than one-third of their students are not ready to learn. Many teachers are alarmed at the number of students who are malnourished, tired out, angry, or apathetic or who have trouble with the social routines of the classroom. The members of the commission, like other experts in early childhood education, are pleased that the governor of our state has set a goal that acknowledges the importance of the early years. However, we share a deep concern about the goal: that it will focus attention on the supposed deficiencies of children entering school, not on the need to ensure that children have positive experiences in their early years that schools can build on. In the worst case, they say it could promote the practice of screening children out of school.

This fear is based on, to some extent, various practices and attitudes that have been observed and felt here in this state. Many educators and policymakers view readiness as a high bar that students must be able to jump over by the time they start kindergarten. The high bar is present in some of our kindergartens, where as many of 38 percent of the children in one school were not promoted to the first grade. Maybe those kids could have used a pole vault! That interpretation of readiness raises our concern. To quote Sue Bredekamp, Director of Professional Development for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), "Readiness should not be construed as an entrance criterion, nor should the goal be interpreted to mean that there's some magic group of skills and abilities that defines readiness." Instead, the goal should underscore the need to provide support for families, such as preschool programs for poor children and affordable health care. "We need to meet the whole child's needs" and to "address early life inequities," she urges. "We should frame the goal from that perspective."

Others are asking educators to get away from a ready/not ready orientation, which implies there is a switch in a child's head that is thrown at some point, and they are ready to learn. We agree with Dr. Lorrie Shepard who feels, "You are born ready to learn." It is dangerous to act as if some children are ready to learn and others are not, she believes. "If schools close the door to those children who are least skilled, they are denying help to those who need it more."

We know that the readiness goal is a tremendous opportunity to focus on the needs of young children. However, our concern for the readiness of children must be matched by a concern for the readiness of schools to respond to the "wide variety of backgrounds" those children bring to school with them. More diverse teaching methods, not more sorting of students.

The Commission, at its first meeting, set the tone and purpose for its work – probably best expressed by: young children's readiness for schools has to be matched by schools' readiness for young children. After carefully considering the National Association of State Boards of Education's call for restructuring schooling for four- to eight-year-olds, we formulated a plan to study the issues that would assist policymakers and practitioners as they sought to develop a vision for early childhood education. We believe this vision can lead to models and strategies that will improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms and lead us to more effective services for young children and their families.

Starting Right, Starting Right Now is the document that the Louisiana Early Childhood Study Commission has produced in order to bring attention to the changes that are desperately needed if we are to achieve the first National Goal. This series of issue papers calls attention to current practice and relevant research, and proposes recommendations that address this new vision for early education and care. The collaboration of early care and education providers and advocates for young children brought diverse perspectives to our document, which is the tangible product of our work, but the collaboration itself is a product we are very proud of. Members representing school districts, Head Start, universities, organizations for young children, government agencies dealing with education and social services made *Starting Right, Starting Right Now* a reality.

What the Commission, through our document, is saying is that the A, B, C's of the 20th century are inadequate to help children survive, not to mention thrive, in the 21st century. If we are going to "future-proof" these youngsters, we are going to have to give them a core of abilities where good decisions and responsibility for learning are central.

If the Early Childhood Study Commission is truly representative of the larger community of early care and education providers, Louisiana is ready to move toward these recommendations, and in fact, is beginning to take some steps, if not giant steps, in these areas.

It is our hope the recommendations and strategies generated from this collaborative effort will:

- stimulate the ongoing dialogue of practitioners and policymakers concerning developmentally appropriate practices in our schools;
- provide direction for policy changes in early childhood education;
- lead to model sites where teachers are supported as they creatively restructure the early grades; and
- last, but not least, create an impetus, an action plan, for *Starting Right, Starting Right Now* so that young children starting school will have the right kind of start.

Superintendent Arveson, the Louisiana Early Childhood Study Commission is extremely pleased to present our finished document, *Starting Right, Starting Right Now,* to you for your review and for recommendations to the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

[1]Selected remarks have been excerpted from a 1992 article in the newsletter from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, *ASCD Update, 34*(10), December 1992.

The Early Childhood Study Commission

The Early Childhood Study Commission was originally organized in response to a recommendation in the Agenda 2000 Action Plan, part of the Louisiana State Master Plan for Education. Specifically, the plan proposed the formation of a committee made up of representatives from all advocacy groups and service providers that were concerned with the care and education of four-year-old children. The following groups/organizations were invited to send representatives:

- State-Funded Programs for At Risk Four-Year-Olds
- Chapter 1 Programs for Four-Year-Old Children
- Head Start
- Universities
  - Louisiana State University
  - Southern
  - McNeese
  - Louisiana Tech
- Church-Based Preschool Programs
- Private Day Care Providers
- Advocacy Groups
  - Agenda for Children
  - St. Mark's Community Center
  - New Orleans Council for Young Children in Need
  - National Council of Jewish Women
- Professional Organizations
  - Louisiana Association on Children Under Six
  - Louisiana Association for the Education of Young Children
  - LPACC
  - Child Care Services, Inc.
  - Louisiana Head Start Association
- Office of Literacy
- Department of Social Services
  - Licensing
  - Family Services
  - Project INDEPENDENCE
- Louisiana Department of Education
  - Elementary Education
  - Child and Adult Food Program
  - Interagency Coordination/Infants
  - Toddlers

- Louisiana Department of Education (cont.)
  - Preschool
  - Student Services
  - At Risk
  - Chapter 1

- Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

- Louisiana Legislature
  - House Education Committee
  - Senate Education Committee

- Child Development Center, Woman's Hospital

A group of approximately 40 people responded to the initial invitation and met on September 25, 1990 to organize the work of the Commission and identify the most pressing issues surrounding early education and care of young children. In Louisiana, the group was asked to formulate a mission statement based on the activities suggested in the Agenda 2000 Action Plan.

The Early Childhood Study Commission discussed the suggested activities and direction of its work. As a result of its deliberations on the needs of four-year-olds it adopted a more comprehensive review. The basis for this shift was twofold: concerns related to the presence of a two-tier system of educational programming – one for disadvantaged children who were labeled at risk and one for children who attended fee-for-service program, and a desire to assure that schools would be ready to address the developmental needs of children regardless of their chronological age.

The Issues in Brief

Individual commission members shared many concerns about current practices in early childhood programs and the quality of services available for young children. Taken as a whole, these concerns demonstrated a lack of any comprehensive plan for coordinating and improving the quality of services for young children. Specific concerns included:

- widespread use of inappropriate testing and assessment methods
- current policies on readiness and retention
- state policies that result in an inappropriate curriculum for early grades
- practices that lead to tracking, ability-grouping
- fragmentation of and lack of coordination between programs
- lack of effective parent involvement programs
- widespread use of untrained staff for preschool children
- lack of certification and licensing standards

In October 1990, a mission statement was adopted by the Early Childhood Study Commission. As a first step, the Commission decided to develop a series of position papers on key issues and present them to public education officials. Information on early childhood trends and initiatives were gathered from roughly 25 states and from various national organizations. The various subcommittees used these documents to identify trends in early childhood programs and policies throughout the country as a basis for the recommendations presented here. The most helpful documents are listed in the Resources and References section at the end of this document.

In January and March of 1991, the chairpersons of each subcommittee reported on the work of their groups and their preliminary findings. This group decided the topics of the issue papers and the format for papers. Each issue paper includes a description of current practice, questions to consider, the committees recommendations, and strategies to implement those recommendations references. The Commission members met in Alexandria, Louisiana for a two-day summit on June 24-25, 1991. At that meeting, the issue papers were presented to the entire assembly for review.

At this point, the members of the Early Childhood Study Commission have demonstrated their commitment to improving early childhood education in Louisiana by attendance at five meetings and the production of these issue papers.

The Early Childhood Study Commission plans to continue meeting and offering suggestions to policymakers and practitioners on ways to help Louisiana prepare its youth for the 21st century.

Current Services

TABLE 1
Early Childhood Services in Louisiana

Parish	Population (under 5)[1]	Preschool and Public Schools						Head Start[2]	Day Care Centers[3]	
		Chapter 1 Preschool	Even Start[4]	Model Early Childhood	Starting Points	Other Programs[5]	Children with Disabilities[6]	Children Served	Class A Centers	Class B Centers
Acadia	4,774			60	20	40	84	249	8	10
Allen	1,598	20		20	19	151	90	126	5	1
Ascension	4,950	40		20	18		216	180	6	20
Assumption	1,860	80		20	37		105	60	3	
Avoyelles	3,019	120		60			54	243	8	5
Beauregard	2,342			18	14		171	80	3	7
Bienville	1,189	81		20			59	84	5	2
Bossier	7,246	80		40	40		140	273	12	21
Caddo	19,545	1,300		60			528	707	63	30
Calcasieu	13,109	40		40	40	120	415	482	36	40
Caldwell	706		60	20	20		24	60	1	2
Cameron	791			35	20		31			2
Catahoula	872			17	16	35	17	60	3	1

[1] Based on 1990 census.

[2] FY 1992 cpapcity, including expansion figures. Approximately 60% of enrollment is four-year-olds.

[3] Average capacity of licensed day care (A&B centers) is estimated at 54 children per center.

[4] Even Start is a family literacy program serving families with childen ages 0-7; 4-7 year olds may be receiving services from other programs.

[5] Includes 8g Block Grants, Locally-Funded Programs, and Minimum Foundation Programs (MFP).

[6] Child count data as of December 1, 1992; includes three- to five-year-olds.

Parish	Population (under 5)[1]	Preschool and Public Schools						Head Start[2]	Day Care Centers[3]	
		Chapter 1 Preschool	Even Start[4]	Model Early Childhood	Starting Points	Other Programs[5]	Children with Disabilities[6]	Children Served	Class A Centers	Class B Centers
Claiborne	1,188			40	37	15	24	82	4	3
Concordia	1,571			20	37		21	100		
Desoto	2,033	20		40	33		70	85	2	5
E. Baton Rouge	29,225	431	450	77	19	140	435	1,134	93	107
E. Carroll	930	20		16			18	134	5	
E. Feliciana	1,526	40		20	20		43	77	3	
Evangeline	2,855	106	80	20	37		49	232	15	4
Franklin	1,814	Aides for MFP		37	20	126	47	94	4	5
Grant	1,391			19	16		24	94	1	3
Iberia	6,006	100		20	34		254	280	18	16
Iberville	2,535			20	17		45	204	10	4
Jackson	1,063						16	137		2
Jefferson	32,777		360	100	40		389	844	85	110
Jeff. Davis	2,484	20		20		100	113	195	3	5

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Parish	Population (under 5)[1]	Preschool and Public Schools						Head Start[2]	Day Care Centers[3]	
		Chapter 1 Preschool	Even Start[4]	Model Early Childhood	Starting Points	Other Programs[5]	Children with Disabilities[6]	Children Served	Class A Centers	Class B Centers
Lafayette	13,934			40	40		268	447	49	43
Lafourche	7,091	130		20			282	140	11	10
La Salle	904	14		20			27	82	2	2
Lincoln	2,605			19			44	204	13	4
Livingston	5,657			20			131	120	5	25
Madison	1,086	183		15			32	90	5	1
Morehouse	2,463	20		20	19		86	196	10	5
Natchitoches	2,805	180		20	20		145	149	14	10
Orleans	38,574	2,000	500	120	40	416	511	2,091	220	54
Ouachita	11,410	20	20	60	40		113	482	42	32
Plaquemines	2,152			40	40	70	32		4	4
Pointe Coupee	1,753			20	20		55	133	5	3
Rapides	10,102	240		40	40		231	852	28	35
Red River	791	81	160	20	16		8	50	2	

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Parish	Population (under 5)[1]	Preschool and Public Schools						Head Start[2]	Day Care Centers[3]	
		Chapter 1 Preschool	Even Start[4]	Model Early Childhood	Starting Points	Other Programs[5]	Children with Disabilities[6]	Children Served	Class A Centers	Class B Centers
Richland	1,584			37	38		86	126	5	1
Sabine	1,740			20			42	89	1	4
St. Bernard	4,917		183	20			109	94	12	27
St. Charles	3,896		20	20		14	95	153	13	11
St. Helena	865	15		20	19		27	60	1	2
St. James	1,812	Aides for MFP		18		147	40	208	7	4
St. John	3,838			18	19		152	137	10	9
St. Landry	6,737			58	39		169	641	31	11
St. Martin	3,935			20	20		117	285	13	8
St. Mary	5,140	97		34	35		97	283	17	6
St. Tammany	11,614			60	38		332	340	23	47
Tangipahoa	6,649	120		60			186	420	18	16
Tensas	571			19			45	85	2	
Terrebonne	8,400			60	40	20	245	80	13	15
Union	1,500			20			42	40	2	3

[1] Based on 1990 census.

[2] FY 1992 cpapcity, including expansion figures. Approximately 60% of enrollment is four-year-olds.

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Parish	Population (under 5)[1]	Preschool and Public Schools						Head Start[2]	Day Care Centers[3]	
		Chapter 1 Preschool	Even Start[4]	Model Early Childhood	Starting Points	Other Programs[5]	Children with Disabilities[6]	Children Served	Class A Centers	Class B Centers
Vermilion	3,998	84		17	34		152	345	1	8
Vernon	6,538			38	38	20	97	249	2	4
Washington	3,012	30		38	35	11	78	240	4	7
Webster	2,996	240		20	19		75	214	7	7
W. Baton Rouge	1,568						30	90	7	5
W. Carroll	874			20	17		55	34	1	2
W. Feliciana	667	Aides for MFP	60	18		128	33			1
Winn	1,182	19		20			71	73	4	1
Monroe City		458		20			66	*		
Bogalusa City		20		39			58	*		
Total for All Parishes	334,649	6,580	1,690	2,067	1,220	1,553	7,946	15,618	1,002	832

[1] Based on 1990 census.

[2] FY 1992 cpapcity, including expansion figures. Approximately 60% of enrollment is four-year-olds.

[3] Average capacity of licensed day care (A&B centers) is estimated at 54 children per center.

[4] Even Start is a family literacy program serving families with childen ages 0-7; 4-7 year olds may be receiving services from other programs.

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[6] Child count data as of December 1, 1992; includes three- to five-year-olds.

Educational Issues

ASSESSMENT

CURRENT PRACTICE

Test reforms particularly related to young children are already being implemented in California, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, New York, North Carolina, and Vermont. The expert panel for the national goal on school readiness has recommended the development and use of multiple developmentally appropriate measures for assessment purposes. Organizations ranging from the National Association for the Education of Young Children to the Council of Chief State School Officers have called for the elimination of standardized testing with young children.Increased usage of standardized tests is a response to the public's demand for accountability at all levels. Standardized Group administered paper and pencil achievement tests to assess and evaluate young children (preschool to age eight) are used in all Louisiana parishes.

These test results are used to make decisions that have a *direct* effect on children and their future success in school; decisions about placement in grade; grouping into a particular instructional level, or participation in an enrichment program, decisions that may exclude children from "regular" kindergarten and put them in "transition" classes or "special education," retain them in grade, or qualify them for Chapter 1 or other special services. In addition, decisions about the effectiveness of curricula or programs and effectiveness of individual teachers that are based on standardized achievement test results have an *indirect* affect on children because of the inevitable comparisons between teachers, schools and districts. While there is clearly a need to identify and address individual student needs so as to provide an appropriate instructional approach, additional support services, the practice of using them as a basis for important decisions is questionable. Another indirect effect is the result of the fact that testing is expensive. Time spent in preparation, taking the test, and recovering from the test taking experience is generally not factored in when considering the costs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Q: **Will individually administered tests solve the problems described here?**

A: No, not if they are used to retain children so that classes will be more homogeneous. It is a response to the downward movement of the curriculum so that today's kindergarten expectations are yesterday's first grade expectations. Good screening and readiness instruments are not designed to be used for placement decisions, rather screening instruments are designed to identify children who may need indepth diagnosis and readiness instruments to provide information that will assist in planning appropriate instruction (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 1991; SACUS, 1990).

Q. **Why aren't group administered tests appropriate for young children?**

A: Young children develop at varying rates. Any assessment given to a child is like a "snapshot" that gives a picture of the child at that point in time. Predicting future development on the basis of one test does not take into consideration the "spurts and stops" in normal childhood development (Charlesworth, 1989). Administration of these

tests to young children is stressful, as evidenced by an increase in the frequency of stress behaviors. For example, children respond with wrong answers to questions they could answer correctly under other circumstances, and copy answers from other students' test booklets (Fleege et al., 1990; Wodtke, 1989; Frisbie & Andrews, 1990). But more importantly, they are not valid and reliable measures of children's achievement and they encourage teaching to the test which narrows down the scope of the curriculum.

Q: **Do curriculum and instructional methods that focus on preparation for written tests improve test scores?**

A: No. Kindergarten children from teach-to-the-test classrooms do not get significantly higher scores on standardized achievement tests than kindergartners who are in more developmentally appropriate classrooms (Burts, Charlesworth, & Fleege, 1991).

Q: **Do children who have been retained on the basis of standardized achievement test scores do better academically than children with comparable scores who are not retained?**

A: Research indicates that by third grade the academic differences between children who have or have not been retained on the basis of standardized achievement test scores equalize out. But there is a high correlation between retention and poor self-concept and there is a higher percentage of drop-outs among those who were retained (Smith & Shepard, 1987).

Q: **How does teaching to the test affect instruction?**

A: Teaching to the test "dummies down" instruction, narrowing the curriculum to fit the specific, decontextualized skills included in the test. Drill and practice, workbooks and worksheets, flashcards, and large group instruction are more common instructional methodologies. Decontextualized reading and math skills are emphasized at the expense of other areas such as science, social studies, art, and music (Madaus, 1988). Teachers respond to pressure for improved test scores by concentrating on basic skills and use valuable instructional time for test preparation (Shepard & Dougherty, 1991).

Q: **How does testing affect teachers?**

A: Teachers feel the pressure to look good by having their students obtain high test scores. Unfair or invalid comparisons made between classrooms, schools, and districts, the adoption of developmentally inappropriate instructional methods, and the stress on themselves and their students is demoralizing for teachers (Shepard & Dougherty, 1991).

Q: **Are there acceptable alternatives that are already available?**

A: Yes and no, observational checklists, individual interviews, portfolios of children's work, photographs, audio and video tapes are all appropriate alternatives for documenting student achievement (Grace & Shores, 1991; Kamii, 1990; Kamii & Lewis, 1991; FairTest, 1990). Still, good testing for young children is only now being developed. For example,

Georgia has developed individually administered assessment procedures that are designed to inform and improve teaching practice. The procedures (they are not test items in any traditional sense of the word) are administered throughout the year when the teacher feels the child is ready. The order in which the tasks are presented may be different for each child. The amount of time spent on a task may also differ. The total amount of time involved is estimated to be a little over an hour per child. North Carolina has developed observational checklists for grades one and two that can be used in place of standardized tests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Immediately discontinue the use of group paper and pencil standardized achievement tests for the assessment and placement of young children below grade three. Provide training in the use of multiple indicators when assessing the progress and needs of young children.

    - Develop new approaches for documenting and reporting the development of young children primarily through teacher observation and recording of development while children are engaged in natural developmentally appropriate activities.

    - Use appropriate early childhood assessment instruments for diagnosing special needs and providing developmentally appropriate instruction. (Provide training in the use of multiple indicators when assessing the progress and needs of young children).

    - Require training in the use of developmentally appropriate assessment practices for all administrators and staff who provide educational services for young children.

2. Provide training in the use of multiple indicators when assessing the progress and needs of young children.

    - Provide extensive training for practitioners and/or evaluators in the proper administration and use of new assessment procedures.

    - Provide training for preservice teachers through their teacher preparation program, for administrators through the Leadership Training Academy, and for inservice teachers through the Regional Service Centers and the Local Education Agencies.

    - Set standards for teacher preparation and professional development programs that will provide training in developmentally appropriate methods of assessing children.

3. Adopt a statewide testing policy.

   - Research alternatives and collect information about alternative practices being developed in other states.

   - Study current public policy to determine which laws, guidelines, and policies need to be changed.

   - Limit the use of tests to the purposes for which they were designed (e.g., *readiness assessment to guide initial instruction*, and *screening to identify children who need more indepth diagnostic assessment*).

   - Review tests to ensure that they meet standards for reliability and validity, that the questions and/or tasks included are developmentally appropriate, and that they are free from cultural and gender bias.

   - Develop policies that encourage the use of multiple measures and discourage the use of test scores alone as a basis for making educational placement or retention decisions.

   - Review the need for and purposes of all testing.

   - Monitor the overall testing schedule to guard against the proliferation of redundant testing.

   - Establish a procedure for state and local coordination of testing and for coordination within school systems.

4. Eliminate the use of standardized achievement testing as a means of grouping children in pre-K through grade three.

   - Implement flexible promotion standards that do not lock children into meeting strict and often unrealistic requirements in order to progress to the next level.

   - Provide an opportunity for children to benefit from a rich school experience before formal assessment is incorporated into the program.

   - Address individual students' needs through the use of support services such as speech and language therapists, psychologists, social workers, and curriculum coordinators.

5. Include parents in the assessment process.

   - Disseminate information about tests to parents. Inform parents, the general public, and policymakers at the state, local, and national levels about the dangers

of inappropriate assessment practices and the advantages of appropriate alternatives.

- Use a combination of informal interviews and observation during the first weeks of school and parent conferences to obtain histories of previous educational experiences, health, and to determine children's instructional needs.

- Facilitate parental ability to express concerns about local, state, or federally mandated testing policies to the appropriate educational authorities and policymakers.

Educational Issues

READINESS

CURRENT PRACTICE

Readiness, although a popular term, is not clearly conceptualized in current educational practice. As a general rule, "readiness" criteria are used to make judgements about a child's overall behavioral and cognitive ability. Essentially, the criteria measure a child's adaptation to the age and grade expectations of the program being offered in that child's school. Among the education goals the President and the Governors have established for the nation is one that seeks to ensure that children enter school ready to learn. But achieving a goal of "school readiness" is a complex task: not only must we help children prepare to learn, we must also prepare schools to be "ready" for children.... When all children enter school motivated to succeed in school, then we will have achieved our goal of "school readiness" (Horn, Gall, LeTendre, & MacDonald, 1990).

The assumption is that children who are "not ready" do not belong in school. A system which labels a child as such often makes the decision based on indicators of social immaturity and/or cultural differences – traits which are often best ameliorated by participation in school with a group of peers. Postponing school entry for a year appears to have little effect on the leveling off of test scores which occurs in third grade. Current research suggests that readiness is influenced by culture and home language, that behavior of children from diverse ethnic homes is often misunderstood, and children are labeled "unready" rather than culturally and linguistically different (Andrews, 1991).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q: **What is the effect of establishing readiness "norms" to keep children who are deemed immature out of programs?**

A: When readiness criteria are used for a gate-keeping function, they support the practice of expecting children to be ready for school rather than schools being ready for children. Where children are expected to meet the demands of the school, schools establish transitional classes, raise the age of school entry, or hold children out of school – all strategies that essentially rely on a natural increase in age. All of these "solutions" tend to increase the demands on children in the "regular" kindergarten program. Schools should be prepared to work with children at a variety of experiential and developmental levels. Many factors such as learning style, temperament, language, cultural background, and family structure contribute to individual differences among children. These differences are not addressed by an extra year in kindergarten (Bredekamp, 1987, 1990; Charlesworth, 1989; Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; NAECS/SDE, 1987).

Q: **Does postponing school entry for a year result in higher achievement in elementary school?**

A: When screening instruments that are designed to identify special needs or to place children in special programs are used to track very young children, they become tools to label children as school failures before they have even started school. Research shows that it is the quality of the program and the involvement of parents, not the chronological

age of entry that determine later school success (Langer, Kalk, & Sears, 1984). Readiness is not just a function of time, nor is growth solely a function of maturity; Adults can play an active role in facilitating children's learning.

Q: **Are there valid and reliable instruments for the determination of school "readiness"?**

A: No. Tests which are used to deny entry to school or permit assignment to a special class must offer the highest assurance of reliability and validity. Many educators and legislators assume that the tests that determine which children are "ready" for school are valid and reliable. "No existing readiness measure meets these criteria." (Willer and Bredekamp, 1990).

Q: **Does labeling a child "not ready" affect the child's self concept? Does it have a negative impact on the child's school career?**

A: The early experience of failure for a child has a negative impact that is rarely reversed. There is a strong correlation between early school failure and dropping out. Although a correlation does not prove a cause and effect relationship, it seems reasonable to assume that children who do not have positive school experiences will be more likely to leave as soon as they are legally able to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Adopt policies that accept children for school on the basis of chronological age and legal right to enter, shifting the focus from whether or not children are ready for school to whether the schools are ready for children.

    - Adopt policies that encourage placement of all children who are legally eligible into a kindergarten program. Abolish practices that add an extra year of school either through kindergarten retention and/or placement in non-regular kindergarten classes.

    - Ensure that students from all racial, ethnic, and language minority backgrounds are provided an equal opportunity to enter a regular kindergarten program when they are age eligible.

    - Eliminate legislative requirements that encourage early labeling/failure/ retention.

2. Restructure elementary schools to establish an early childhood level to serve children preschool through third grade. Ensure that classrooms are designed, arranged and equipped to create a safe, stimulating learning environment for young children.

3. Empower parents to investigate the practices used to evaluate young children as they enter school.

- Provide parents, educators, lawmakers and the general public with materials related to developmental appropriateness and how "readiness" concepts have affected children, retention rates, and the state's high illiteracy rates. Promote a public awareness campaign describing developmentally appropriate teaching practices that fit the way children learn.

- Provide curricular materials, resources, and parent materials that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of families.

Educational Issues

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM

CURRENT PRACTICE

The term "developmentally appropriate" refers to both age appropriate and individually appropriate growth in all domains of development – physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. Researchers have identified fairly predictable sequences of growth characteristic of children at different ages. Knowledge of these "typical" abilities and patterns can provide guidance for teachers as they design learning experiences and environments that encourage maximum growth and maturation. Within those guidelines, however, schools and teachers recognize that "each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style and family background" (NAEYC, 1987), and that flexibility is required to meet the needs of some children. Young children learn by doing and play is an essential ingredient of a developmentally appropriate curriculum, it is "a primary vehicle for and indicator of their mental growth" (NAEYC, 1987).

A survey of kindergarten classes in the state of Louisiana reveals that many teachers use inappropriate instructional methods. In addition, there is little continuity from kindergarten to first grade (Charlesworth et al, in press). Kindergarten is generally based upon a developmental continuum while first grade is often very skill specific. There is no coordination of the curriculum from first through third grade. In addition, there is a lack of continuity of philosophy from school to school and from parish to parish. According to Dr. David Elkind (1987), adults tend to teach children what and how they think children learn rather than in the way that children actually learn. As a result, children tend to be hurried through the curriculum, becoming frustrated learners at an early age. Burts et al (1990) found that children in developmentally inappropriate kindergarten classrooms exhibited significantly more stress behaviors than children in developmentally appropriate classrooms.

"Developmental kindergarten" classes or "extra year" programs have emerged as a result of rigid expectations for kindergarten. Kindergarten retention occurs when a decision is made that a child is deemed "unready" for the next level of education. Young children are caught in a trap created by rising standards, norm referenced tests, and curriculum and teaching practices more appropriate for upper grade levels. This combination of practices often results in early school experiences that are inappropriate for the optimal development of young children.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q: **How can schools more effectively respond to developmental differences among children?**

A: Avoid unrealistic expectations for young children and an over-emphasis on teacher directed instruction. The best means of addressing individual developmental differences is through the use of curriculum and instructional methods that allow for different rates of maturation as identified by the goals set by NAEYC. Teachers should be free to set goals appropriate to the group, while at the same time having the flexibility to respond

to the needs of individual children. Teachers should be able to use varied techniques and timelines to help children become literate and successful learners.

Each child has a unique profile, with areas of relative strengths and weaknesses forming a constellation of developmental characteristics. To fit the program to the child, it is essential to know the child well and have a clear view of his/her developmental profile.

Q: **What is an appropriate program for 3-8 year olds?**

A: A developmentally appropriate curriculum addresses both age appropriate and individually appropriate needs of young children. Guidelines developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children may be found in **Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8.** To summarize, an appropriate curriculum will address all developmental areas – physical, social, emotional, and intellectual – to establish a solid foundation for later education and help children learn how to learn. The curriculum is integrated so that learning occurs primarily through projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflect current interests of children.

Q: **How can the diverse needs of children in the same group be met through the curriculum and the program?**

A: Emphasize meaningful experiences and understanding of content rather than focusing on isolated skills. For example: in math, emphasize problem solving and provide frequent opportunities to apply mathematical ideas and skills to real life problems; in reading, emphasize comprehension through the use of children's literature, language experience stories and reading material that reflects the life experiences and background of the students; in writing, emphasize the writing process by giving children plenty of opportunities to write about their own experiences and ideas. Curricula which are inspiring, engaging and involve children in solving meaningful problems within the context of real situations, rather than through repetitive, drill-like mastery of component skills, will promote more successful outcomes for all children (Knapp & Shields, 1990).

As recommended by Knapp and Shields (1990), where there is balance between teacher direction and student direction of learning, teachers:

1. provide many opportunities for teacher/child and child/child discussion about ideas, applications of learning, or meaning in written materials;
2. integrate learning experiences;
3. model, demonstrate or explain strategies that enable children to monitor their own comprehension, tackle unfamiliar problems or carry out extended tasks independently;
4. set up supplemental instructional arrangements that are flexible and integrated with regular classroom activities for children who need extra help;
5. provide for project based activities that foster learning in heterogeneous groupings.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Establish early childhood units with child-centered curricula to serve young children from preschool to grade three. Develop a well articulated early childhood curriculum that is based on developmentally appropriate practices and allows for individual differences in maturation and growth.

   - Staff the early childhood units with teachers and administrators who have certification in early childhood education.

   - Conduct a thorough assessment of current practices in pre-K, kindergarten, and primary classrooms and other child care providers using the guidelines developed by the Louisiana Early Childhood Study Commission, NAEYC and NAESP.

   - Use nationally recognized guidelines for developing and implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum for the early years.

   - Provide intensive training for service providers before and during the implementation of the new early childhood unit in schools.

2. Fund, implement, and enforce smaller class sizes for the early years in accordance with NAEYC and LACUS guidelines.

   - Use the money currently being spent on extra-year programs to improve the quality of the regular program.

3. Encourage classroom environments that support the growth and development of every child.

   - Use interventions other than retention for children with academic difficulties.

   - Adopt flexible promotion standards that do not lock children into meeting strict or unrealistic requirements in order to progress to the next level.

   - Educate the community – parents, teachers, administrators and policymakers about developmentally appropriate practices , the detrimental effects of retention, and the rationale for change.

   - Structure schools and classrooms and academic standards so that teachers can expect and respect individual differences.

4. Implement developmentally appropriate curricula in all pre-K, kindergarten, and primary grades; that is, the curriculum should be both age-appropriate and individually-appropriate. The curriculum should be adjusted to meet the needs and interest of the individual child rather than having the child fit the existing curriculum.

- Adopt nationally recognized developmentally appropriate practices for all pre-K, kindergarten, and primary grades.

- Provide funding for statewide inservice training and education for teachers, administrators, and parents on developmentally appropriate practices. This training should be for primary grade teachers as well as early childhood professionals, principals, and parents.

- Provide inservice workshops to principals and administrators on developmentally appropriate practices through the Administrative Leadership Academy.

Educational Issues

RETENTION/EXTRA-YEAR PROGRAMS

CURRENT PRACTICE

Grade retention, the practice of requiring a child to repeat a particular grade or requiring a child of appropriate chronological age to delay entry to kindergarten or first grade, is common practice nationwide. The Center for Policy Research in Education estimates five to seven percent of public school children (about two children of every 30) are retained in the U.S. annually (CPRE Policy Briefs, 1990). By the ninth grade approximately 50 percent of all students in the U.S. have been retained in at least one grade. In 1990-91, nine percent of Louisiana's public school children in grades K-8 were retained (Louisiana Department of Education Annual Statistical Report, 1990-91).

A study conducted by The National Forum on the Future of Children and Their Families found that in most districts between 10% and 50% of the children eligible to enter kindergarten were denied entry based on a single test score. Researchers found the following:

- Academic readiness testing is used in some communities in 30 states prior to kindergarten (seven states mandate the practice)
- Readiness testing is used prior to first grade in 43 states (six states require this test)
- Extra-year programs are reported to exist in forty states.

In Louisiana, as well as across the United States, school systems have special classes – called *readiness classes, D-K or developmental kindergarten, transitional classes, junior kindergartens, two-year kindergartens* – for children who are labeled as "not ready" for kindergarten. The existence of these programs suggests that many children have been judged as failures school before they have even begun.

National debate on retention policies and the use of transitional classes has resulted in policy changes in a number of states.

CALIFORNIA – In California, transition programs are now illegal.

MASSACHUSETTS – In Massachusetts, the State Commissioner of Education urged schools to abolish retention in the early grades.

NEBRASKA – The Nebraska State Board of Education has issued a position paper that strongly suggests that all five-year-old children be enrolled in kindergarten and that no child be held back for developmental reasons.

TEXAS – In 1990, the Texas State Board of Education voted unanimously to prohibit districts from retaining children in pre-K groups and in kindergartens. In April of 1991, however, the Texas board inserted the phrase "without parental consent". It also strongly urged schools not to establish "transition classes".

VIRGINIA – Virginia's State Department of Education conducted a study which concludes that "the extra year often does more harm than good, especially to children's feelings about themselves and to their attitudes about learning."

In February of 1990, the nation's governors went on record as saying, "Placement decisions should not be made on the basis of standardized tests."

According to the Louisiana State Department of Education's 1990 Annual Statistical Report, retention rates in the state in kindergarten through grade three range from 6.0 to 11.6 percent. The following is a breakdown of the total population in each grade and the number of children retained in the grades addressed in this document, kindergarten through third grade.

Retention Rates in Louisiana (1990)*

GRADE	ENROLLMENT	NO. RETAINED	PERCENTAGE
K	66,547	6,148	9.2
1	68,594	7,981	11.6
2	63,532	3,848	6.0
3	63,924	4,060	6.3
TOTAL K-3	262,597	22,037	8.4

*These figures do not include the number of children enrolled in extra-year programs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q: **Why are so many children being retained?**

A: Retention has been adopted as a method of "protecting" the child from inappropriate practices in the following grade (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). For example, if the first grade class was extremely structured and demanding, the kindergarten teacher might retain the child or suggest a transitional program to shield the child from the possibility of failure in the first grade classroom.

Current assessment and program evaluation practices in Louisiana encourage the use of inappropriate educational practices. Children are often required, by Parish Pupil Progression Plans, to finish a designated number of basal readers before they may be promoted to the next grade. As a result kindergarten teachers try to prepare their children for success in first grade by using more structured traditional academic methods with them. Children who are not believed to be "ready" for the structured program (generally measured by a standardized test), are placed in "transitional" classes. Systems

that do not have an extra-year program retain students who did not perform well with a structured academic curriculum. Teachers who feel pressure to have their children score well on standardized achievement tests try to prepare them for paper and pencil assessments by "training" them to fill in the blanks by using more workbooks and ditto sheets (Charlesworth, 1991; Shepard & Dougherty, 1989).

As a result, the system forces children into the existing curriculum, rather than adapting the curriculum and instructional methods to the needs of the child (Bredekamp, 1987; Meisels, 1987). Those who cannot adapt to the system *within the time defined by the system* are selected out by retention. Even then, there is no assurance that the educational service provided the child will be substantially different from what resulted in 'failure' in the first place.

Q: **Does the use of retention or transitional classes improve student achievement?**

A: No. Controlled studies do not support the benefits claimed for extra-year programs. In fact, there are negative effects for children who are placed in transitional programs as well as those who are retained. In a review of 16 controlled studies on the effects of extra-year programs, the major finding was one of no difference. The studies compared children who were retained with those who were recommended for retention, but the parents refused. At the end of first grade, when the retained children had completed three years of schooling and the non-retained children had completed only two, there was only one difference. The extra-year children were <u>one month</u> ahead on reading scores. No differences were noted between the two groups on math scores or teacher ratings of academics, maturity, self-concept, or attention span. The same study showed an equal number of children at the top and bottom of their class (Shepard & Smith, 1987).

Although advocates of retention cite success stories of children who have repeated a grade, these studies are often flawed since they usually lack a control group (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Their support for the practice of retention is based primarily on anecdotal evidence rather than sound research. In 1989, C. Thomas Holmes of the University of Georgia reviewed controlled studies where children were retained. Only 9 of 63 studies showed overall positive results for the students retained. In a South Carolina study of 6,000 retained students, researchers found that 40 percent of the students actually scored lower on achievement tests after being retained, while 20-30 percent scored higher.

Q: **Does retention have other negative effects?**

A: Yes. In controlled studies, parents report that retained children had poorer attitudes toward school. Even parents who supported the decision to retain their child or place them in a transitional program reported that both they and the child suffered trauma. Students who have been retained demonstrate more social regression, display more behavior problems, suffer stress in connection with being retained, and more frequently leave high school before graduating (Shepard & Smith, 1988). Kaoru Yamamoto reports in a 1980 study that children rated the possibility of repeating a grade as more stressful

than "wetting in class" or being caught stealing. The only two life events that children said would be more stressful than being retained are going blind or losing a parent.

Q: **What is the correlation between retention and dropping out?**

A: Retained students are 30% more likely to drop out than others (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Theoretically, children who are retained are more likely to develop low self-esteem and low self-confidence which makes it more likely that they will drop out of school. Students who repeated two grades have a probability of almost 100% of dropping out (CPRE Policy Briefs, 1990). School systems that develop rigid promotion criteria and encourage the use of grade retention as a method of assuring the quality and educational competence of their graduates may actually increase rather than reduce school dropout rates.

Q: **Does the use of retention or transitional classes address the problem of "immaturity" or low achievement?**

A: Two years in kindergarten does not solve the problem of "immaturity" or low achievement (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Parents and teachers often have low expectations of children who are in transitional classes. In addition, these children lose access to positive role models for success and confidence.

Q: **Is there a relationship between gender, race, or ethnic status and SES and are disproportionate numbers of male or minority students being recommended for delayed entry or retention?**

A: National data collected from the October 1986 Current Population Survey indicate that the percentage of overage students was 31 percent for males as compared to 22 percent for females. Of the males retained, 42 percent were African American, 29 percent were Hispanic, and 29 percent were Anglo.

Percent of Overage Students for Grade
(National Data)

By gender	Male	31%
	Female	22%
By ethnicity	African-American	42%
	Hispanic	29%
	Anglo	29%

Retention Rates in Louisiana by Race/Ethnicity*

Grade	White	Black	Hispanic	American Indian	Asian
K	7.2%	11.5%	14.9%	24.5%	5.6%
1	7.9%	16.0%	8.4%	16.8%	7.9%
2	4.1%	8.4%	4.7%	10.7%	3.7%
3	4.3%	8.9%	7.3%	7.1%	3.1%

*1990 Louisiana Department of Education Statistical Report

Q: **Is there any information on retention rates in other industrialized nations?**

A: Retention rates of five to seven percent in the United States compare to zero percent in Japan and the United Kingdom and a median of two percent for Europe and the Soviet Union (Shepard & Smith, 1988; CPRE Policy Briefs, 1990).

Q: **What is the effect on the regular classroom when "less able" children are removed and placed in transitional programs?**

A: Increased academic demands hurt the children who can handle it as much as they hurt the children who fail. The "more able" children who are placed in extremely academic programs report stress-related symptoms, unwarranted fear of failure, and school-avoidance behaviors (Elkind, 1987). Older students can sit for longer periods of time and complete more pages in a workbook. When "less able" or immature children are removed from the classroom, the regular program tends to become more academic (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). Research also indicates that homogeneous ability grouping not only harms less able children, it does *not* help the more able students (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Oakes, 1986; Slavin, 1986).

Q: **What type of curriculum is being offered to students who are retained?**

A: Often, the curriculum for the students who are retained does not change. The retained student experiences the same strategies and teaching techniques used the previous year there may be little or no adjustment for the child's needs or learning style (Massachusetts Board of Education). Data is not available on curriculum offered to retained students.

Q: **How does the general public feel about retention?**

A: In a 1986 Gallup poll, 72 percent of the U.S. citizenry favored stricter grade-to-grade promotion standards. There was no indication that those questioned knew what promotional policies were actually in effect.

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Q: **What are the financial considerations related to retention and transitional programs?**

A: For each child that is retained or placed in an extra-year program, the school system must pay for an additional year of schooling. According to Shepard and Smith, retention increases the cost of educating a pupil by 8%, assuming that the pupil remains in school to graduate. This cost runs into the billions nationwide. While it could be argued that the high dropout rate among retained students ultimately reduces the cost of education, there are moral as well as economic repercussions for the nation and the state as well as for the individual.

Rice, Grissom, and Shepard noted that "Dropping out carries with it the probability that the individual's lifetime earnings will decrease by up to one quarter of a million dollars." Not only does the child pay with a year of his or her life, but the state pays, too.

In Louisiana, the average annual cost to educate a child is approximately $3,300. This includes regular as well as special education students in the public school system. The following data is an indication of the direct cost of retaining children in Louisiana in 1989:

The Cost of Retention in Grades K-3*

Grade	Total Number Retained	Cost to State
K	6,005	$19,816,500
1	8,120	26,796,000
2	4,167	13,751,100
3	4,543	14,991,900

TOTAL RETENTION COSTS FOR GRADES K-3 = $75,355,500

*1989 data. Extra-year programs that are reported as regular kindergartens are not included in these figures.

Q: **Are there alternatives to retaining children or placing them in transitional classes?**

A: Yes. The Perry Preschool Project has demonstrated the value of four-year-old programs that are developmental in nature. 61 percent of the low-income students attending preschool scored at or above the national averages as compared to 38 percent of those who did not.

Recommendations and Strategies

1. Reduce the use of retention prior to grade three. Replace extra-year programs with alternative strategies that address children's and families' needs.

   - Publicize research comparing retention to alternative intervention practices at the preschool, kindergarten, and primary levels.
   - Increase the number of four-year-old programs to meet the needs of young children, especially all low-income and at risk preschoolers and parents.
   - Implement flexible promotion standards that do not lock children into meeting strict and often unrealistic requirements in order to progress to the next level.
   - Alter guidelines that set promotion/retention criteria for early childhood programs that will be addressed in each system's Pupil Progression Plan.
   - Revise existing policies that encourage retention. For example, Bulletin 741 requires that students attend school a minimum of 160 days. Those students not meeting the attendance requirements are retained.

Educational Issues

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING

CURRENT PRACTICE

Many Louisiana students in kindergarten through third grade have been put in homogeneous classes or groups according to achievement levels, chronological age, perceived ability, or "readiness" as determined by standardized test scores, screening scores, teacher-made tests, and/or teacher judgement. Young children are being placed into developmental kindergartens, transition classes, accelerated or gifted kindergarten classes, or even delayed entry, instead of regular kindergarten. Members of the Early Childhood Study Commission conclude that present kindergarten screening requirements have led to far too much grouping. There is strong support among early childhood educators for heterogeneous grouping, support that is based on sound research.

Definition of Terms

Ability Grouping – The separation of children in schools on the basis of perceived ability, determined by standardized test scores, student academic performance, less formal teacher assessment, and/or parental or student input. Generally, students are separated into high-, average-, and low-achieving classes. Groups may remain together for a complete school day or they may be regrouped for each lesson.

Between-Class Ability Grouping – Students are assigned to different classes within a school, based on their ability level, so that the range of abilities between individual classrooms varies but the range within any one classroom is narrower than the range of abilities within the entire grade level in a school.

Heterogeneous Grouping – Students, regardless of ability, are taught the same curriculum in a single group.

Within-Class Ability Grouping – Students in a heterogeneous classroom are placed in smaller groups according to ability for specific lessons and subjects.

Mixed-Age Grouping – Children of different ages are in the same classroom. Over the years, it has been used in different ways in early childhood and primary school classes. Montessori classes, for instance, have traditionally been made up of children of different ages. Mixed age grouping is common in small rural schools and cross-age tutoring has been used, in one way or another, for hundreds of years.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q: **Why has homogeneous ability grouping been so widely adopted?**

A: The decision to track students into different ability groups has been based on one or more of the following assumptions:

- Ability grouping is believed to promote achievement because students can advance at their own rate with others of similar ability.

- It is generally believed that ability grouping makes it easier for teachers to provide appropriate materials and subject content to students of similar ability.

- There is a concern that less capable students will suffer less emotional and educational damage from being in classrooms of peers with similar ability levels than they would from daily contact with higher achieving peers. It is assumed that students are challenged to do their best in a more realistic range of competition.

Q: **What's wrong with ability grouping?**

A: Extensive research into the effectiveness of ability grouping has yielded little evidence that ability grouping improves academic achievement, and overwhelming evidence that ability grouping actually retards the academic progress of students in low – and middle-ability groupings. In fact, "the longer the intervention, the more recent the study, and the better the research methods, the **less** evidence there is that students learned more when grouped by ability (Featherstone, 1987). When the evidence is examined, "ability grouping does not achieve the intended purpose of improving the delivery of education to the wide range of students enrolled in schools" (Massachusetts, 1990).

- Students in lower ability groups usually receive a different education than students in high ability classrooms. In low ability classes, teachers tend to hold the workload to a minimum, they accept more distractions, and they rarely ask students to think critically (Good & Brophy, 1987).

- Ability grouping has a cumulative effect of widening the achievement and knowledge gap between groups of students. The net effect of ability grouping is to exaggerate initial differences between students, rather than to accommodate them (Weisendanger, 1981).

- Ability grouping affects students' future opportunities and aspirations. Students in the highest ability groups demonstrate the highest level of educational aspiration, while the lowest group students show the lowest (Alexander, Cook, & McDill, 1978).

- The practice of ability grouping tends to send strong messages regarding the relative value and importance of the students in the different groups. The affective development of students suffers with ability grouping. All research summaries agree that the affective development of students depends upon the group to which one is assigned (Froman, 1981). High-achieving students have high self-concepts in both homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings; however, the self-concepts of many high-achieving students in homogeneous groups are based on self-comparison with students in low-achieving groups. Low-achieving students in homogeneous classes tend to have lower self-concepts than low-achieving students in heterogeneous classes (George, 1988).

- Ability grouping has negative effects upon peer interactions within schools. Students tend to choose friends from among students who take the same classes, based upon

who they come in contact with most frequently during the school day and who they perceive to be most like themselves. As a result, friendship choices among students are limited by their ability groups (Sorenson & Hallinan, 1984).

- Ability grouping perpetuates segregation by race, socioeconomic background, gender, language, and special education status (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988). Many educators believe that the chances of achieving quality, integrated education in schools that practice ability grouping are reduced.

- Ability grouping is an ineffective means of addressing individual differences. Typically, ability grouping has little impact upon the heterogeneity of a class. Because students are usually divided into ability groups based upon performance, there remains significant heterogeneity in terms of student IQ and ability levels. Most teachers teach uniformly, rather than matching instruction to meet a diversity of learning styles. Few teachers regularly utilize interactive and student-centered instructional approaches such as cooperative learning (Goodland, Anderson, 1963).

Q: **What are the alternatives to whole-class ability grouping?**

A:

- ***Continuous progress*** is a plan of organization designed "to optimize what can be learned when children of different–as well as the same–ages and abilities have opportunities to interact" (Charlesworth, 1989). Children enter school at an age mandated by state law and progress through the stages at their own pace. The K-3 program is divided into stages. The traditional grade divisions disappear. There is no need for retention; each year each child picks up where he/she left off the year before.

- ***Flexible grouping*** is short-term grouping within a classroom or grade level that is based on the interests and social needs of children. Research indicates this kind of short term needs based grouping is beneficial provided that the grouping is short-term.

- Research on ***peer tutoring*** and ***cooperative learning*** indicates that structured interaction between less able children ("novices") and more able children ("experts") benefits all individuals both academically and socially.

- ***Mixed-age grouping*** relaxes the rigid, lock-step curriculum with its age-graded expectations, which are inappropriate for a large proportion of children. Furthermore, mixed-age grouping might also lead to a reduction of screening and standardized testing in the early years (Katz, 1990).

Q: **What is considered appropriate grouping practice for young children?**

A: According to NAEYC, "Classroom groups vary in size and composition depending on children's needs. Children are placed where it is expected that they will do their best, which may be in a family grouping and which is more likely to be determined by developmental than by chronological age. Persistent difficulties of individual children are handled

in small groups with more intensive help and the composition of these groups is flexible and temporary" (Bredekamp, 1987). The size of classroom groups and ratio of adults to children can be regulated to allow active involvement of children; time for teachers to plan and prepare group projects that integrate learning and skills in many subject areas; time to plan for and work with individual children having special needs or interests; time to work with parents; and time to coordinate with other teachers, teams of specialists, and administrators. Groups of five-, six-, seven-, and eight-year-olds are no larger than 25 with two adults, one of whom may be a paraprofessional, or no larger than 15 to 18 with one teacher.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Eliminate whole class ability grouping. Regulate class size and adult to child ratios. Mainstream children with special needs as much as possible.

    - Assign five through eight-year-old children a primary teacher with relatively small groups of 15 to 25. Their learning and development is integrated and should not be divided into specialized subjects to be taught by special teachers. Provide specialists who can assist the primary adult with special projects, questions, and materials.

    - Integrate special needs children into the mainstream classroom socially as well as physically. Avoid isolating special needs children in a segregated classroom or pulling them out of a regular classroom so often as to disrupt continuity and undermine their feeling of belonging to the group.

2. Provide training in appropriate uses of various grouping strategies for early childhood administrators and service providers.

Educational Issues

Continuity and Coordination Between Early Childhood Providers

CURRENT PRACTICE

Continuity refers to the linkages and congruence between and among early childhood programs and between families and early childhood programs. According to a recent report by the Committee for Economic Development, "Education and child development policies have produced a crazy quilt of programs, often overlapping, uncoordinated, and conflicting, and this situation has created serious barriers to delivering services to the children and families that need them" (Hamburg, 1991). Several factors contribute to this discontinuity including:

1. Unique properties and goals of familial and nonfamilial groups;
2. The variety of early childhood programs that are available (e.g., Head Start, special needs programs, day care, preschool, kindergarten, Montessori, etc.);
3. The variety of systems for delivering early childhood services (e.g., for-profit, nonprofit, church based, family day care, public schools, etc.); and
4. Philosophical differences between early childhood and primary school professionals.

All children face transitions from home to day care or school, from one grade level to the next, or from one school to another. Early school transitions are especially important because the attitudes and reputations established at the beginning of grade school may follow children through their years of formal schooling (Ladd & Price, 1987).

At present, there is no comprehensive state wide plan in Louisiana to assure continuity for children as they move across settings (i.e., between family and early childhood settings and between preschool, kindergarten, and primary programs). An informal telephone poll of early childhood coordinators in several larger school districts in the state indicated a concern about the lack of collaboration between/among Head Start, public and private early childhood programs, and primary programs in planning developmentally appropriate curricula for young children. They also noted that parents are often fearful or uncomfortable about coming into school settings.

Some of the school districts polled indicated that they did not believe that transition and continuity was a major issue for them because; Head Start programs are located in the schools or have been placed under the jurisdiction of the local school board; only a small percentage of kindergarten students enter school from nonpublic programs; and most of their children remain in the same school setting throughout their early childhood years.

A variety of methods are currently being used to assist with continuity and transition. Strategies used by the school systems surveyed include:

- parent teacher conferences and meetings at the end of the year;
- meetings between church based, nonpublic, and Head Start providers and public administrators;
- kindergarten round-up;
- open house;
- Even Start parent education programs;
- parent brochures;

- observation exchanges between teachers in public and Head Start programs; and
- schedule of school events provided to Head Start directors.

The Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory (SEDL) is working with early childhood professionals on a three-year Plan of Action for Continuity and Transition.

Current barriers to successful transition/continuity include outdated instructional strategies, grouping practices that delay entry or retain children in their first few years of school (Ham & Perry, 1988), inappropriate evaluation procedures, lack of teachers and school administrators, trained in early childhood education (Burts, Campbell, Hart, & Charlesworth, 1991).

Questions to Consider

Q: **Why is the issue of continuity important to child development and early education?**

A: Strengthening relations between families and early childhood providers can have benefits for ethnic minority children and/or children whose parents have a limited education. These populations are more likely to experience discontinuities between home and early childhood programs that may adversely affect the development of social and academic competence. Supportive linkages between and among agencies can contribute to a child's ease of adjustment and sense of competence (Powell, 1989). According to Peters and Kontos (1987), the impact of change depends on: 1) the magnitude of the difference; 2) the duration of the discrepancy; 3) the timing in relation to "sensitive periods" of development, and 4) the preparation for and communication with the child about changes (Powell, 1989). Ladd (1990) points to the importance of peers in school adjustment and suggests that school administrators consider grouping children to maximize contact with prior friends.

Q: **Who benefits from programs designed to facilitate transitions/continuity?**

A: Everyone. Adults who provide for continuity among programs and help children move from one environment to another are supporting children's sense of self-confidence. This can have a positive impact on motivation and openness to new experiences, and children are more likely to sustain gains. Parents gain confidence in their children's ability to achieve in new settings and have a sense of pride and commitment in their ongoing involvement in the education of their children. Teachers can build on earlier experiences and provide continued growth. Greater cost effectiveness and improved morale are potential benefits to the community (Rich, 1987; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1986).

Q: **How would a developmentally appropriate curriculum facilitate continuity and smoother transitions between programs?**

A: When preschool, kindergarten, and primary programs provide for continuity, children entering the new settings are likely to find familiar activities that allow them to begin the new experiences confident that they have the ability to accomplish certain tasks. Familiar routines can add to the children's self-confidence, encourage their attempts to try new activities, and facilitate their development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1986).

Q: **Who should be involved in facilitating transition/continuity?**

A: If successful continuity and transition is to be accomplished, parents, children, teachers, school administrators, support agency personnel, and the community as a whole must be involved. Day (1988) suggests early childhood educators work cooperatively to create coherent curricula that "progressively supports and builds on learning and development throughout the early childhood years", and broaden their focus "outward to involve all of the relevant constituents of early childhood programming."

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Provide incentives to improve coordination between and among educational agencies, child care programs, and social service agencies to ease the transitions between educational settings for young children and their families.

    - Encourage collaboration among public and private preschool programs, Head Start, and teachers and parents of young children (birth – age eight) in the planning and implementation of curricula and methods that are aligned with current understandings of growth and learning in young children.

    - Assess the current situation on community needs, existing programs and policies, coordination between early childhood development and education, and gaps in coverage.

2. Cooperate with social services and other groups to establish improved systems for sharing information about children and families in need of help.

    - Cooperate with Adult Education, JTPA, Welfare Reform, Volunteer Literacy, and other programs (Chapter 1, Headstart, Even Start, Family Literacy, etc.) to enhance parents' literacy levels.

    - Make routine home visits to build closer links to families and encourage parents' commitment to and involvement in their children's education.

    - Coordinate efforts with other support agencies to develop programs that support families with children, prenatal through grade three.

3. Develop procedures and materials to assist schools in making the initiation into school a positive experience for children and parents.

   - Develop procedures for transmitting information between/among early childhood programs that would provide information relevant to programming while insuring the rights of privacy of parents and children. These procedures should be established by a community-wide transition committee.

   - Provide information on staff development activities that include administrators and teachers from all early childhood programs in the community (e.g., public school programs, private and church-facilitated programs, Head Start).

   - Remove legislative barriers that impede cooperation between early childhood service providers.

   - Involve parents and children in planning for transitions as a positive experience.

4. Study the impact of continuity and/or discontinuity.

   - Provide financial assistance to study the issue further and identify effective practices related to transition and continuity.

   - Conduct comprehensive assessments in each community to determine how well it is addressing the needs of children.

Educational Issues

WORKING WITH PARENTS

CURRENT PRACTICE

The second subgoal from the national goals on school readiness states, "Every parent in America will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping his or her preschool child learn; parents will have access to the training and support they need." In light of the need to provide parents with the information necessary to help their children begin school ready to learn, many states have adopted plans to ensure that this is possible.

Kentucky, Minnesota, and Missouri lead the nation in programs designed to involve parents in their children's education. These programs focus on children from birth to age four. Missouri is the only state that mandates that parent education and family support exist in every school district. The state reimburses school districts for a portion of the cost (Copple, 1990).

Programs in Kentucky, Maryland, and Oregon work with at risk families. Oregon provides services for at risk families with children birth to age eight, and Maryland provides services to teenage parents with children birth to age three (Boyer, 1991). These programs offer such services as adult literacy, parent support groups, joint parent-child activities, home visits, access to toys and books, and programs specific to child development.

Standards that focus on parent involvement in the public schools have been adopted by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. These standards include:

> Parent involvement and support shall be sought through communication between school and home. (2.076.06)
>
> Each school shall develop a written plan for community/parent involvement. (2.076.07)

Traditional parent involvement activities already exist in most primary and elementary public and non-public schools. Examples of typical activities include PTA membership, parents working as volunteers in classrooms, attendance at parent nights, parent-teacher conferences, chaperoning field trips and coordinating classroom holiday celebrations. In addition, many schools send home a regular newsletter to keep parents informed of school activities.

There are also state or federally funded programs that require a parent involvement component; programs such as the state funded Four-Year-Old High-Risk Program, Head Start, Chapter 1, Licensed Day Care that receives USDA funding, and special education programs (in terms of IEPs). Since 1989, East Baton Rouge and Orleans Parishes have been funded for Even Start, a federal program that emphasizes family literacy by requiring programs that provide an early childhood education component, an adult literacy component, a parent and child together component, and a parenting skills component. Even Start in Louisiana utilizes home-based as well as center-based activities.

There are a several programs in the state that focus on the development of parenting skills. These include:

- The *Pilot Parent Education Program for Parents of At Risk Children*, ages birth to four, is in the second year of implementation. It serves approximately 600 families in Acadia, Assumption, Caddo and Winn parishes. Parents receive inhome services that provide information and guidance they can use to enhance their children's physical, social, and intellectual development, reduce stress, and increase their pleasure in parenting.

- HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) is a two-year voluntary, home-based preschool program that puts story books and activity packets into the hands of educationally disadvantaged four and five year olds, emphasizes the role of the mother as a child's first teacher, and raises her self-esteem.

- The Safety Net Program is sponsored through the West Feliciana Parish School Board and serves parents of at risk infants and toddlers. The parenting center contains a parent library and offers parent training sessions for interested parents.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Q: **Why should we involve parents in their child's education?**

A. Parents are a child's first teacher. They influence values, morals, language patterns, behavior modes, literacy levels, and the kind of basic concepts a child acquires before formal schooling experience begins. Research shows that direct parent involvement impacts academic success.

Q: **What kind of parent involvement programs are most effective?**

A. ***Parenting education*** that provides information on child development and assistance with parenting; ***parent support***, that focuses on the parents as individuals and provides social networks and resources for them; ***parent empowerment***, which promotes parents' confidence and control of their lives, helping them develop these attributes in their children's lives; and ***adult literacy training*** for parents, as well as job training/retraining in conjunction with or prior to parenting training.

Q: **Who benefits most from parent involvement?**

A. The child is the ultimate benefactor, but there are also benefits for the parent, the school, the community, and society in general.

Q: **Why is parent involvement lacking in early childhood programs?**

A: Low levels of parent involvement can be attributed to two sources: parents and schools. Some parents aren't aware of the positive impact their involvement can have on their children's academic success; some feel that because they lack a formal education, they are

not qualified to help their children. Parents who themselves had difficulty in school, dropped out, or had unpleasant experiences, may be uncomfortable or intimidated in a school setting. Cultural differences in parents and teachers may also cause some parents to feel uncomfortable. Differences between parents and teachers may be magnified when children are bused out of their neighborhood schools. Finally, 75% of all school-age children have mothers who are working outside of the home.

Although many schools have written plans for parent involvement, many do not implement them. Parents may be told that their participation is valued but school staff don't provide opportunities, aren't clear about ways that parents may be involved, or they don't make parents feel welcome when they do participate. School staff may be unaware of or unskilled in parent involvement, relying on traditional methods even though the results are disappointing. Finally, some schools simply don't want parents to interfere with their work.

Q: **What can schools do to improve or implement parent involvement programs in their schools?**

A: Parent involvement programs require time for planning and implementation. Teachers as well as school administrators often lack training in this area. Inservice programs for teachers can help them develop effective parent-school interactions. Teachers and principals are more comfortable and confident having parents in the classrooms and schools if they have received training and know what to expect. Healthy partnerships between parents, teachers, and schools can develop when there is mutual understanding and respect. A clearer understanding of the factors that keep parents away can be useful in designing more effective school family interaction.

Q: **How can teachers, principals, and other school staff encourage parent involvement in their schools?**

A: Parents need to feel that they are genuinely valued and that their options and suggestions are important and worthwhile. Parents should be given opportunities for meaningful involvement. For parents to feel comfortable in their roles as partners in education, their needs, interests, cultures, and lifestyles must be considered. Parents must be asked for help and if they do not volunteer in traditional ways, should not be presumed to be disinterested.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Encourage the development of effective parent involvement programs, that enable parents to develop their parenting skills, voice their concerns, and support their children's education.

    - Conduct a community needs assessment in each parish and decide the greatest concerns parents have for themselves and their children. Develop a plan of action accordingly.

- Adopt policies that encourage providers to incorporate a parent involvement component in early childhood programs that includes:
  - child development information for parents
  - parent support
  - parent empowerment
  - parent and child together activities

- Include parents in the community-wide planning council, school committees, and other forums that elicit their input and contribute to self-confidence, empowerment, and literacy.

- Encourage the appointment of a parent involvement coordinator at each school with an early childhood program.

- Develop a process for assessing the long-term effect of family programs on dropout rates, attendance, retention, student self-esteem, and other important outcome indicators.

2. Provide inservice training to LEAs for developing implementing and evaluating parent involvement programs.

   - Provide information and training to help early childhood care providers create parent programs that are sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of parents and that recognize the self-esteem of parents as integral to the development of the child.

   - Involve administrators in inservice training that promotes parent involvement.

   - Give release time for teachers to receive training on parent involvement, to conduct parent conferences and to make home visits.

   - Distribute information on parenting and parent involvement opportunities to all parents.

   - Create a resource lending library at the parish level for parents and educators that includes information on parenting and successful parent involvement programs.

   - Develop evaluation instruments and procedures that can help parishes assess and continually improve their parent involvement programs.

   - Include parents in the planning of early childhood programs and survey them to determine their needs. A parent involvement coordinator should be named at each school.

- Include information on child development parent support, parent empowerment, and activities for parents and children together when developing parent involvement programs.

- Encourage school systems to provide opportunities for teachers to visit parents and children in their homes several times during the school year.

5. Support legislation for state funding of Family Literacy Programs.

   - Compile a list of possible funding sources and make this available to administrators of Early Childhood programs.

   - Mobilize parents to help pass legislation that will implement parent involvement programs.

Organizational Issues

APPROVAL/LICENSING OF PROGRAMS

Current Practice

Standards related to the development and delivery of services to and for young children are varied, with several categories of approval or licensing of early childhood service providers. While programs that are required to meet standards are approved, licensed, or accredited, many programs have no requirements at all.

Approved: Preschools affiliated with public schools or with state accredited parochial schools or private schools are approved by the State Department of Education and operate under guidelines established by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Licensed: Licensing requirements establish minimum standards for quality. Current practice mandates minimum standards for full-time child care programs including Head Start. These standards are detailed in two separate licensing classes - Class A and Class B. If a private program qualifies as full-time child care (over 20 hours), then either Class A or Class B licensing is required. The two separate classes of licensing standards provide different levels for maintenance of service to young children.

> **Class A:** Class A standards set specific requirements for personnel, records, training, learning environment, health, and safety.
>
> **Class B:** Class B standards are minimal and allow great flexibility related to personnel, record keeping, staff training, learning environment, health and safety.

Accredited: Private and public programs voluntarily seek accreditation through a process developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

No requirements: At the present time, there are no requirements for the licensing of:

> Part-Time Child Care Programs (under 20 hours). Some part-time programs voluntarily address licensing requirements, although they are not required to do so.
>
> Employer-Sponsored Child Care: Parents On Site (full-time or part-time). The exemption of employer sponsored child care was intended to allow limited service facilities (e.g., Health Spa), to provide limited supervision for children while parents participate onsite.
>
> Full-Time Summer Programs (Child Care)
>
> Family Child Care Group Homes: Seven to twelve children
>
> Montessori Schools are currently exempt from licensing. Some Montessori schools are approved by the State Department of Education and operate under guidelines established by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Private Programs Serving Handicapped Children. Children that have been identified as handicapped must receive special services, with parental approval, if a service plan has been developed under guidelines of Public law 101-IDEA. These special services may be provided by the local education agency or other equivalent public agency. Children not identified as handicapped, or children whose parents refuse special services, are not required to receive services.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Q: **Should licensing requirements be changed or expanded?**

A: Licensing requirements should be combined and modified to ensure a basic level of quality in all programs serving young children. All programs should be encouraged to implement high standards.

Q: **Should NAEYC accreditation be voluntary or should it be required for specific programs such as those receiving public funds?**

A: All Louisiana children have the right to quality child care and early education. Services and facilities for children should go beyond minimum standards to ensure safety, security and appropriate learning for children. All programs should address NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice Standards and begin to prepare for the accreditation process. NAEYC accreditation should be required of all full-time child care and early education programs. Any change in requirements should allow time for training and phasing in new practices. Other programs should be strongly encouraged to adopt practices that would align them with NAEYC standards.

Q: **What is the process for accreditation which NAEYC and NAECS/SDE propose for public preschool programs?**

A: The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), in conjunction with the National Association for the Education of Young Children has developed a process for the accreditation of preschool programs in public schools. SACS utilizes NAEYC standards to evaluate preschools in public schools for SACS accreditation.

All preschool programs should meet NAEYC developmentally appropriate practice standards. Achievement of these standards should provide a foundation for the future accreditation of programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Standardize and strengthen licensing requirements for early childhood care/education providers. Require all programs to address NAEYC standards for developmentally appropriate practices through staff training and development.

- Require all <u>full-time programs</u> to meet Class A standards.

- Combine licensing standards for Class A and Class B into one class – Class A modified. Combine written licensing standards for Class A and Class B into one publication.

- Close the loophole in the licensing law that exempts employer sponsored care. Require employer sponsored care to reflect the same Class A standards as required for onsite care of more than twenty hours per week, or more than seven children at a time.

- Revise licensing standards to include Montessori Schools that do not currently operate under guidelines developed by the State Department of Education.

- Review and revise licensing standards for full-time summer programs as needed.

- Include half-time and part-time programs within current licensing requirements.

2. Strengthen licensing requirements for Family Child Care home providers receiving public funds.

   - Upgrade standards for Family Child Care homes related to training, health and safety, equipment and immunization in all programs receiving public funds.

   - Encourage all Family Child Care homes to comply with registration procedures.

   - Encourage all Family Child Care home providers to participate in staff training and upgrade of equipment.

3. Strengthen licensing requirements for programs serving special needs children.

   - Ensure that standards and requirements of P.L. 101-IDEA are addressed and monitored.

   - Provide opportunities for parents of children in programs to gain knowledge related to their rights under P.L. 101-IDEA.

   - Implement procedures which ensure that therapeutic services provided to special needs students meet at least minimum standards.

4. Define State Department of Education policies and administrative standards for preschool programs.

   - Include policies and standards for preschool programs in SDE Bulletin 741.

   - Correlate these policies and standards to developmentally appropriate practice standards.

- Compile State Department of Education Policies and Standards in a brochure that can be distributed to both private and public programs.

- Require all public preschools to address NAEYC: Developmentally Appropriate Practice Standards.

5. Implement a process for technical assistance to all early childhood programs using NAEYC certified validators.

Organizational Issues

APPROVAL/CERTIFICATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDERS

Current Practice

There are several levels of certification for early childhood service providers. They include:

Child Development Associate (CDA) – CDA credentials are optional certification for early childhood providers in Louisiana. CDA is "equivalent qualification" for teachers and/or directors in the licensing regulations in 39 states and the District of Columbia.

Child Care Training – Twelve clock hours of training are required annually for child care licensing.

Voc-Tech Child Care – Child care training is now offered as a vocational-technical course at three schools in the state. The programs are not consistent or standardized.

Associate Degree – Two-year associate degrees in early childhood education are being offered at post secondary institutions.

State Certification – Louisiana State Certification with a B.S./B.A. are available in the following areas:

- Early Childhood Education Certification: Nursery/kindergarten
- Elementary Education Certification with a kindergarten endorsement (K-8)
- Lower Elementary Education Certification (K-4)
- Early Childhood Certification can be added to Elementary Certification (n and 1-8 certification but does not include kindergarten)
- Early Childhood Education Certification may be added to Home Economics (can teach four-year-olds in elementary school)
- Alternative Certification determined on an individual basis based on specific criteria
- Masters Degree in early childhood education and add nursery/kindergarten

Recommendations and Strategies

1. Develop levels of training for early childhood professionals and non-professionals that include a beginning certification, national credentials, and/or a college degree.

   - The Division of Licensing and Certification for Child Care Centers, the Department of Social Services Division of Certification, and the Department of Education should offer a license or certification from their department(s) for early childhood professionals upon receipt of their associate degree in early childhood education or child development.

   - Develop state certification standards to add an endorsement for teaching 0-3 years to nursery/kindergarten certification.

   - Offer a license or certification through the Division of Licensing and Certification for Child Care Centers for early childhood professionals receiving CDA credentials.

- State regulations should require the director, or at least one staff member, of a child care center to have a CDA credential, associate degree, child development, or early childhood education degree.

2. Use licensing requirements to bring all early childhood service providers into agreement with developmentally appropriate practices as recommended by NAEYC.

   - Recognize only those teacher training programs which adhere to the NAEYC early childhood teacher education guidelines. All programs which train teachers of young children (clock hour, associate degree, and baccalaureate) should include developmentally appropriate practice and child development training.

   - Adopt policies that encourage a closer working arrangement between special education including non-categorical preschool and infant and toddler Part H (of PL 99-457), nursery school, kindergarten, elementary education, Chapter 1, child care programs, and Head Start.

3. Develop a career ladder for early childhood professionals that includes a level for associate degree in early childhood education and/or child development.

   - Align the curriculum in post-secondary early childhood programs to allow credits accumulated for an associate degree in early childhood education or child development to be applied toward an undergraduate degree.
   - Include provisions for students who have earned credits in a vocational-technical child care course to test out of course requirements or apply college credit hours toward a degree program in early childhood education.

   - Include provisions for candidates who have obtained CDA certification to test for college credit hours in an undergraduate degree in early childhood.

Organizational Issues

STAFF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES & REQUIREMENTS

CURRENT PRACTICE

The State of Louisiana has not formulated long-range plans for ongoing professional development for early childhood personnel. Requirements for professional development are minimal for class A and B providers and nonexistent for others. Offerings are often fragmented and limited. There is a lack of communication between early childhood personnel within most areas throughout the state.

Licensed Child Care Centers are required to follow state guidelines concerning continuous professional development. These include: a one day orientation followed by four days of supervised work with children; one staff training meeting every quarter; access to professional literature; and 12 hours of approved training for a Class A license. The Louisiana Department of Social Services, Quality Assurance Section, approves and compiles a list of inservice training opportunities offered annually. No requirements exist for child care providers with fewer than seven children.

Early childhood educators *including certified teachers and administrators in pubic schools* are not required to complete any professional development other than that required by the local school district or that required of schools which are members of Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q: **Why do early childhood educators and care providers need continuing professional development?**

A: High quality early childhood programs are characterized by ongoing professional development. Early childhood education and care is a specialized and rapidly changing profession requiring much on the job support and ongoing professional development. Staff development ideally should be a carefully planned, long-term endeavor with staff involvement. Training should address to the needs of young children and the staff who work with them. Early childhood educators/care providers need ongoing professional development to learn current information about child development and teaching methods and opportunities to interact with other professionals.

Q: **Who should participate in continuous professional development?**

A: All who are associated with early childhood care and education should be involved. This includes home and day care providers, day care workers, center workers and directors, public and private school teachers, coordinators, supervisors, and consultants.

Q: **Who should coordinate professional development efforts in Louisiana?**

A: A coordinated, statewide interagency effort offers the greatest promise of improving the quality of training available to early childhood service providers. Leadership from the Louisiana Department of Education in coordinating and publicizing professional development opportunities throughout the state could facilitate and encourage the

establishment of an effective and efficient system of ongoing training for all early childhood care providers and educators.

Recommendations and Strategies

1. Establish an interagency oversight committee charged with the task of planning, coordinating, publicizing, and improving the quality of staff development activities available to early childhood service providers. Provide training in developmentally appropriate practices and effective methods for working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

    - Establish policies that provide for ongoing, high quality staff development for all early childhood service providers.
    - Provide early childhood educators with support and assistance on developmental issues through regular staff development.
    - Provide teachers and administrators with the training necessary to work effectively with the parents of young children.
    - Require a minimum of 12 hours of approved training per year in topics specific to early childhood education for all public and private providers of early childhood services (including administrators and supervisors).
    - Develop incentives and recognition for participation in staff training beyond the minimum level required for all early childhood educators and caregivers.
    - Establish a statewide system for coordinating continuing education opportunities, organized by the Louisiana State Department of Education.
    - Provide for publicity and the distribution of information about courses/sessions available throughout the state.
    - Expand the services of the Regional Service Centers established by the Louisiana Department of Education to improve early childhood services. Employ early childhood specialists to coordinate, plan, and present professional development activities specific to early childhood needs.
    - Utilize appropriate state agencies that are already involved in professional development efforts, including regional service centers, state colleges and universities, and the administrative leadership academy.
    - Encourage collaborative efforts by early childhood education and child care agencies to provide for consistency and cost effectiveness in staff development.

3. Direct state funding towards support of professional development activities that enhance the capabilities of early childhood educators and caregivers.

   - Allocate funding at the local level for early childhood personnel to attend professional conferences sponsored by approved agencies and organizations.

   - Allocate state funds or tuition exemptions to encourage early childhood personnel to take approved college courses in early childhood education.

Organizational Issues

Before and After School Child Care

CURRENT PRACTICE

Due to an increasing number of dual-earner families and single-parent families, more children are left unsupervised during the before and after school hours when parent(s) aren't home. These children are generally referred to as "latchkey children." Few programs in Louisiana address needs of these children and their families.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Q: **How many children are in self-care situations?**

A: Although estimates vary, the 1987 U.S. Census Bureau reported that 1.2 million children are in self-care. However, these figures are disputed by many. Some estimates run as high as 15 million (Research Report, 1990). Most recent national statistics indicate that 74.4% of mothers with children between the ages of 6 and 17 years of age are working full-time outside of the home. Data reported in the *Statistical Handbook on Women in America* indicates that in 1987, 68.7% of mothers of three- to six-year-olds were in the labor force, and 65.1% of mothers with children under three years were employed outside the home (Taeuber, 1991). In fact little is known about how many of these children are involved in after school care. Moreover, little is known about the type of care these children are receiving while their parent(s) are at work. Information is not currently available regarding the number of women employed outside the home in Louisiana or the type of care that their children receive.

Q: **Why should we be concerned about latchkey children?**

A: Although research findings are mixed (Powell, 1987), there is evidence to suggest that latchkey children who are unsupervised after school and children who are in custodial, poor quality after school child care centers are at risk for school failure and a variety of emotional disturbances and problem behaviors (Galambos & Maggs, 1989; Long & Long, 1983; Steinberg, 1986; Vandell & Corasanti, 1987). Additional findings suggest that children without parental supervision experience more fear, loneliness, and boredom, are more at risk for health and safety problems, and are increasingly susceptible to peer pressure involving drug, alcohol, and tobacco use (Garbarino, 1980; Long & Long, 1982; Seligson & Fink, 1988; Steinberg, 1986; Strother, 1984). Many also feel that preadolescents and young adolescents left on their own are less likely to be able to handle emergencies (Long & Long, 1981) and are more likely to engage in early sexual experimentation leading to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Long & Long, in press; Research Report, 1990). In addition, results of recent surveys indicate that public school teachers view "children being left on their own after school" as a significant risk factor above and beyond drugs, poverty, and divorce that affects children's performance in school (Seligson & Fink, 1988).

Q: **Do parents minimize some risk factors by training their children in self-care?**

A: Results of a recent study indicated that parents of latchkey children generally do <u>not</u> provide any more self-care training (such as establishing rules for dealing with

emergencies) than do parents of children who are in supervised care (Todd & Alfich, 1988).

Q: **What demographic characteristics are linked to children's self-care knowledge?**

A: A recent study found that older school-age children had more overall knowledge about self-care skills and felt that their parents had prepared them more for self-care than younger children. Also, high SES children had more overall knowledge about self-care skills and felt that their parents had prepared them more for self-care than low SES children. Females felt less secure about their self-care knowledge than males (Arnold, 1989).

Q: **Do quality school-age child care programs help reduce some risk factors?**

A: Research findings suggest that when latchkey children attend high quality child care programs that are continuous with the child's elementary school program, fewer negative and more positive outcomes prevail (Howes, Olenick, & DerKiureghian, 1987). Indications are that children in after school programs also do better academically and socially than do similar peers without care (Long & Long, 1983), unless the programs are of poor quality (Vandell & Corasanti, 1988).

Q: **How many school-age child care programs are operating in Louisiana?**

A: There are no statistics available regarding the number of publicly sponsored school-age child care programs operating in Louisiana, the number of children who participate in before and after school care programs sponsored by private child care centers, churches, the YMCA, YWCA, Boys Clubs of America, Camp Fire, Incorporated, or private schools. In addition, little is known about how many are taken care of by neighbors, relatives, and friends.

Q: **How do cost factors influence parents' decisions about after school care?**

A: Cost tends to be an overriding factor for lower-income parents more than for middle- and higher-income parents in determining whether to involve children in after school care (Powell, 1987).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

1. Work closely with schools to expand upon and/or design quality before and after school programs that reduce risk factors for all children.

   - Help public schools develop systematic procedures to work closely with families and develop cooperative relationships with private sources of after school care.

   - Encourage schools and other public and private agencies to make space and resources available for before and after school care.

- Bring educators, municipal officials, child care representatives, and parents together to discuss arrangements for before and after school care for young children.

- Explore the possibility of revising school schedules to adjust to before and after school needs of working families.

- Provide the financial incentives to encourage the development and implementation of instituting after school programs.

- Provide for financial assistance to low SES dual-earner families and single parent families who cannot afford quality after school care for their children.

2. Find out how many children need after school care, how many are currently involved in after school care, what types of after school care are available, and the quality of programs currently available in Louisiana. Seek funding to study the current situation so that precise recommendations can be made about after school child care needs in Louisiana.

3. Initiate parent education programs designed to help parents teach their children self-care skills. These programs should be geared to the needs of parents who do not enroll their children in an after school program.

   - Mount annual awareness campaigns to inform parents of the need for after school child care and identify resources available in Louisiana.

   - Develop and distribute materials that give parents guidance in preparing the children for self-care.

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- Office of Educational Research and Information
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- California
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